

“The Franco pilgrims: the view of *al-hajj* by a Spanish colonial officer (1949)”

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In my paper I will analyze the rapport written by a Spanish colonial officer who describes the pilgrimage to Mecca by air travel from Morocco, when accompanying and supervising a group of Moroccan notables in 1949.

In 1936 Northern Morocco felt under a double strength of powers. The Spanish Civil War started precisely in the Spanish Protectorate of Morocco (1912-1956), and the colonial institutions were taken by the coup d'état officers. The Franco supporters organized a policy of recruitment of Moroccan soldiers conducted by colonel Beigbeder to fight against the Spanish Republic. In order to legitimize this policy, the new colonial authorities conducted a propaganda based on the idea of a Spanish-Moroccan brotherhood against the non-believers, and the promotion of Muslim rituals.¹ These rituals were mainly the 'id al-adha, and the hajj to Mecca. Between 1937 and 1939, the Protectorate authorities organized the pilgrimage with a Spanish boat [1937: 573 pilgrims; 1938: 796; and 1939: 1009] and they promoted free tickets and grants among soldiers and those notables who supported the colonial order (some oral sources even refer gossips about the pilgrimage made by "al-hajj Franco"). This policy also meant a concurrence between Spain and France to attract the biggest number of pilgrims.

During World War II this policy was interrupted by the international conflict, and it was only retaken in 1947. These pilgrimages were recorded by the Spanish colonial officers sent to describe the incidences of the travel and to avoid any political activities of the pilgrims. Yet once the Spanish Civil War finished, the patronage of the hajj became (according to the Spanish sources) more problematic as far as Panarabism was growing up in the Middle East and North Africa, and the pilgrims could be exposed to those ideas.

For this paper I have selected an unpublished document of great interest, as far as it is an informal and secret rapport, written by the colonial officer Valentín Beneitez Cantero in 1949. The document, narrated from a first person perspective, describes the first organized pilgrimage by plane. As compared to other colonial sources of the same period, more official and technical, this rapport offers a particular view. Beneitez Cantero was moreover one of the few colonial officers to acquire ethnographic abilities, and he published many works about the Jebala region of Morocco. The officer describes the impressions of the pilgrims, mainly Tetuani notables; the contact established with the local populations at the scales (the flight took three days: Tetuan-Nador-Algiers-Tunisia-Tripoli-Bengasi-Alexandria-Luxor-Yedda); his own feelings of disorientation in Yedda, before letting "his pilgrims", and the many problems encountered with passports and borders. In some parts of the story the Spanish officer (also Moroccan Arabic speaker), shares some kind of contextual identity with the Moroccan notables, as far as they do not master oriental Arabic, or discover other customs which challenge some notions that both the Moroccan notables and the Spanish officer shared about the Arab world.

¹ I have previously analyzed the main context of this religious policy in my dissertation (Mateo Dieste, La "hermandad" hispano-marroquí. Política y religión bajo el Protectorado español en Marruecos. Barcelona: Edicions Bellaterra, 2003).

This document (micro-level) will be related to the general context (macro-level) through an exercise of historical anthropology, devoted to interrogate (as Carlo Ginzburg or Jan Vansina have maintained) the officer's "voice" and situating politically his view of the pilgrimage.

Itinerary and scales of the 1949's trip

- 25 September: Tetuan, Nador, Algiers, Tunis, Tripoli
- 26 September: Tripoli, Benghazi, Alexandria
- 27 September: Alexandria, Luxor, Jeddah

- 13 October: Jeddah, Wadi Halfa (Sudan), Tobruk, Tripoli
- 14 October: Tripoli, Tunis, Algiers, Nador, Tetuan